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| 著者 (英) | Kazuo Takahashi |
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Kuwait: Weathervane in the Gulf*

Kazuo TAKAHASHI

クウェート：湾岸の風見鶏

高 橋 和 夫

要 旨

クウェート人ほど豊かな人々を知らない。だが同時に彼らほど将来に不安を抱いている人々も稀であろう。世界最大級の油層の上に位置し、しかもペルシア湾の北端という戦略的要地を占めるこの国は、その地質学的・地理学的偶然により他国の野心的的となってきた。イラン、イラク、サウジ・アラビアという湾岸の大国に囲まれた人口2百万弱のクウェートにとっては、鋭い外交感覚と豊富な石油収入に支えられた金融力がその生きる手段である。地域バランスの変化に即応し、また「みかじめ料援助」と嘲笑されながらも多額の経済援助をばらまく事でこの小国はその生存を維持してきた。しかも人口の過半数がパレスティナ、イラン、イラク、イエメン等からの「外国人」であるため、パレスティナ紛争、イラン革命、湾岸戦争、イエメン内戦といった中東各地での事件にも敏感に反応してきた。このためクウェート外交の展開は湾岸情勢の変遷を忠実に反映している。

また第一次オイル・ショック以降始めて大規模な石油ブームを味わったサウジ・アラビアやアラブ首長国連邦とは異なり、既に1950年代にクウェートはオイル・ラッシュに突入していた。それゆえクウェートはより「成熟」した「先進」産油国であり、その経験は近隣の「後発」産油国に深い影響を及ぼしている。議会制度の導入や共産圏との接触といった同国の諸政策は、最近他の湾岸アラブ産油国の採用するところとなってきた。つまりクウェートは後発産油国の今後の行方を指し示しているわけだ。湾岸政治の傾向を探る上でも、また産油諸国の将来を考える上でもクウェートは貴重な糸口を与えてくる。クウェートを湾岸の風見鶏と呼ぶゆえである。

I

Few nations are as wealthy as the Kuwaitis are, yet few are as insecure as they are. This insecurity derives from a peculiar combination of geographical, geological and demographic factors. Kuwait, since its birth, has faced a series of challenges to its sovereignty by more powerful neighbours, for it occupies a strategically important site of the northern tip of the Persian Gulf littoral, sharing borders with Iraq and Saudi Arabia. And only a narrow strip of Iraqi territory separates this small state from the most populous country of the Gulf, Iran. Also it is the best harbour in the Gulf. A large scale exploration of its oil, which started at the end of World War Two, has transformed this poor desert Sheikhdом into a rich modern city-state. In this process Kuwait has relied on a large number of guest workers who by now constitute the majority of the population. Thanks to its huge oil revenues and small indigenous population, its citizens have long

enjoyed one of the world's highest incomes. Yet this has whetted the territorial ambition of its neighbours against Kuwait. At the same time, the small size of its population (1.7 million) and territory (somewhat smaller than the state of New Jersey) conditioned that Kuwait by itself is unable to build up a credible deterrence and defence.¹⁾ In brief, externally Kuwait is out-classed by neighbours, and internally its citizens are outnumbered by expatriates. How has this mini-state managed to survive in the most volatile area in the most turbulent era in the Gulf history? This essay is to trace the Kuwaiti struggle for survival. It is hoped that this investigation will throw light not only on the Kuwaiti experience but also on a likely path that other oil Sheikdoms may choose to follow, for they share many of Kuwait's characteristics.

II

The official history of Kuwait asserts that one of its islands, Failaka, located not far away off the coast of Kuwait City, was an important port of call for commerce with India as early as B. C. 5,000. History of the present-day Kuwait, however, dates back only to the migration of the Arab tribes led by the al-Sabah family from the interior of the Arabian peninsula to the present site of Kuwait. There, together with its original inhabitants of fishermen, merchants and pearl divers, they built up a fortress-like town of mud-brick houses surrounded by a wall to protect them from nomadic raids. Indeed, "Kuwait" in Arabic means a "small fortress."²⁾³⁾ An oligarchy by about 15 families have ruled Kuwait ever since.⁴⁾ Pre-eminent among them is the al-Sabah, one of whose members became the first Emir (prince) in 1765.⁵⁾ Since that time on, Kuwait has led a precarious existence among its powerful neighbours; the Ottomans in Iraq to the north, the Persians to the east and later in the century the Saudis to the south. Because of this hostile environment in which it found itself, when the British began to make their power felt in the region in the nineteenth century, Kuwait was quick to court them. But the British was reluctant to become embroiled in the Kuwait affairs, because it was a worthless patch of land with full of sand and nothing much else. Besides the British did not wish to complicate its relations with the Ottoman Empire, for the Sublime Port claimed a suzerainty over Kuwait though without exercising much effective control.⁶⁾ In 1871, however, the Ottoman Empire sent an expeditionary force to Arabia to suppress the Wahhabis, the Islamic fundamentalists of the day led by the al-Saud family, whose descendents now rule Saudi Arabia. As a result, Istanbul's grip on the area grew as strong as to threaten the Kuwaiti independence. Kuwait again sought for British protection. By this time, the British were worried that other European powers were displaying interest in the area. France was courting a Sultan of Muscat in Oman. Germany and Russia were seeking a railway concession from Istanbul. The former hoped to link the Berlin-Baghdad railway to the Gulf. The latter had a scheme to link the Mediterranean with the

Gulf. In both schemes, Kuwait was envisaged as a possible terminus.⁷⁾ The British preempted their plans in 1899. In this year, Britain entered a secret engagement with Kuwait in which Britain guaranteed to protect Kuwait in exchange for Kuwait's pledge neither to cede territory nor receive foreign agents without British consent. Also the British provided Kuwait with a cash payment of 15,000 rupees.⁸⁾ By making Kuwait its protectorate, Britain protected its imperial interest in the area from other European powers as well as Kuwaitis from the Ottomans and other regional forces.

This was one of a series of treaties that transformed the Persian Gulf into a British lake. Bahrain, Oman, and the Trucial Sheikdoms or what is now the United Arab Emirates (U.A.E.) entered into the British protection respectively in 1861, 1891 and 1892⁹⁾. And in November 1914, three months after the outbreak of the First World War, Britain publicly placed Kuwait under its protection, for nothing could possibly worsen its relations with the belligerent Ottoman Empire. Two years later in 1916, Qatar concluded similar arrangements with London¹⁰⁾. After the War and the dismemberment of the Ottoman Empire, the British took over Iraq and Palestine as its mandate territories. Moreover Iran, though remained nominally independent, slid even further into the British clutches than before, for its rival in the north, Russia, was paralyzed by the defeat in the War abroad, the Revolution at home and the ensuing Civil War. Thus, after the War the British power and influence in the Middle East reached their height. The Pax Britannica insured the security of Kuwait under its wings. Its dominance over the region, however, was eroded progressively after World War Two and reached its final moment in 1971 when it withdrew from the southern Arab coast of the Gulf. It is in this period of waning British influence in the East of Suez that a state of Kuwait became independent to strive for its survival.

The British hegemony in the Middle East was challenged successively, first by the Jews in 1947 in Palestine, and then by Persians in 1951 and finally by Arabs in 1956 in Suez, and two years later, in Iraq. Each one of these challenges had a profound impact on unanticipating Kuwait. The Zionists fully cooperated with the Allied Powers during the War, because the German victory would have meant not only the destruction of a nascent Zionist entity in Palestine but also the total liquidation of the Jews. Once the War was won and the Nazi threat removed, however, the Zionists turned their guns against the British. Palestine became progressively ungovernable. London decided to give it up, leaving the United Nations the responsibility to decide its future. The General Assembly of the United Nations passed the resolution to partition the land into the Jewish and the Arab zones. In 1948 when the British completed its withdrawal, the Zionists declared the establishment of the state of Israel. Arabs refused to recognize it and the war ensued, leaving the defeated Arabs and Palestinian refugees.

In 1951, this time Iranians caught Britain by surprise, nationalizing assests in Iran of the British-owned Anglo-Iranian Oil Company (AIOC). The AIOC, in

concert with the other major oil companies controlling the world oil market, boycotted Iranian oil. Details of this dispute need not concern us here. We only note that in order to make up for the "lost" Iranian oil, the companies accelerated production in Arab countries, especially in Kuwait and Saudi Arabia. The production in Kuwait increased by leaps and bounds, changing the face and fate of this land from poverty to prosperity. At the close of World War Two, the per capita income in Kuwait was estimated at only \$21. Two decades later, however, it surpassed \$3,000, making a Kuwaiti citizen the richest in the world; while his fellow Arab had to struggle in average to make less than \$200 per annum.¹¹⁾ This abundant oil wealth inevitably triggered a development boom in Kuwait, opening up job opportunities for skilled and unskilled workers. Kuwait, with a small population and low level of their education, had to rely on foreign workers. Notable among them were Palestinians, best educated among Arabs. Many refugees of the war in Palestine moved to Kuwait to offer their service.

In 1956 Arabs hit British interest again, this time in Egypt. President Gamal Abd al-Nasser announced the nationalization of the British-French-owned Suez Canal Company, provoking the military intervention against Egypt by Israel, Britain and France. This attempt to topple President Nasser by force ended in fiasco elevating Nasser's prestige throughout the Arab world to its climax. His call to end all forms of colonial rules echoed throughout the Arab world. Kuwait was no exception. The Arab Nationalists' Movement or Nasserism (the movement to unify the Arab world under Nasser's leadership) received a resonant response in Kuwait, for many Palestinians saw that the way to recover Palestine passed the Arab unity under Nasser. Their enthusiasm with Nasserism was contagious to younger generations of Kuwait's because Palestinians and Egyptians by far constituted the bulk of teachers in the Kuwaiti educational system.

Two years later in 1958, another eruption of anti-British sentiment hit closer to Kuwait. A group of army officers staged a successful *coup d'état* to put an end to the Iraqi monarchy, killing leading members of the regime: the king and his prime minister. Though the *coup* had indigenous causes deeply rooted in the Iraqi history and society, the ousted regime's unabashed alliance with Britain was no help in maintaining its nationalist credential in Arab eyes. Message to Britain and the ruling al-Sabah family in Kuwait was clear. In order to avoid being swept away by the rising tide of the Arab nationalism, Kuwait had to graduate from its protectorate status into a full-fledged independent state.

Thus, in 1961 three years after the fall of the monarchy in Iraq, Kuwait became independent. Only a half-a-dozen days later, Iraq announced its intention to annex Kuwait on a pretext that it had been a part of Iraq under the Ottoman rule. Now the British was leaving, Kuwait should return to its mother land, Iraq, or so claimed Baghdad's propaganda. Iraq deployed forces along the Kuwaiti-Iraqi borders. Kuwait faced a prospect of war with Iraq and its disappearance from the map. Kuwaiti arms was too insignificant in comparison with Iraq's. It would be

just a Iraqi walk-over into Kuwait not even a war. Britain had to despatch its forces to Kuwait to deter the Iraqis.

Besides Britain, other regional powers rallied to block the Iraqi ambition. There was a geo-political reason behind this. For different reasons they did not want expansion of the Iraqi national power that its annexation of enormous Kuwaiti oil deposits would lead to. The monarchs of Saudi Arabia, Jordan and Iran were hostile to the regime in Iraq which seized power by murdering its king. For all of them, radicalism in Baghdad was an anathema. Moreover, Iran had a territorial dispute with Iraq over the Shat al-Arab River. The Shah denounced Iraq's claim to its smaller neighbour and sent a good will mission to Kuwait, congratulating the independence. Baghdad responded typically by severing diplomatic relations with Tehran. As an Arab state, Kuwait can ill afford to seek Iran's military help openly, for that would be too offensive to Arab sentiment. It remains true, however, that Iran was and is an important deterrence against Iraq.¹²⁾ Since then on several occasions, Iran backed Kuwait against Iraq. Noteworthy among them was a dispute in 1973 when Iraq occupied al-Samita of Kuwait, Iran together with Jordan moved troops to the Iraqi border in support of Kuwait.¹³⁾ Neither Egypt desired the extension of Iraqi power, for Cairo and Baghdad were historical rivals over the regional leadership. Therefore Nasser, the dominant voice in the Arab League, mobilized the organization to replace the British force in Kuwait with the Arab League peace-keeping troops of Jordanians and Saudi Arabians, more acceptable in the eyes of the Arab nationalists.¹⁴⁾ The Iraqi army did not move. Kuwait survived the first crisis.

Balance of power in the Gulf saved the day for Kuwait. But Kuwait itself did all it could to improve the chance of its survival in its own way, that is, by money. It offered a large sum of money to Baghdad as "economic aid" which the unkind called the "protection money."¹⁵⁾ Also it granted a generous aid to other Arab states from Jordan to Egypt regardless of their political coloring, in the hope of buying their support and creating their vested interest in the survival of Kuwait, for its annexation by Iraq would mean the end of cash flow from Kuwait.

Kuwait felt it had to develop a progressive image in order to deflect the attacks from the radicals in and out of the country. Thus it gave generously to various radical movements and allowed them to operate in Kuwait as long as they would not turn against Kuwait. The notable among them was the al-Fatah, led by Yasser Arafat, the largest faction in the Palestine Liberation Organization.

Kuwait also started intercourse with the Socialist countries in the early 1960s. In 1963 after the change of the regime in Baghdad, Moscow accorded its diplomatic recognition to Kuwait. In the next year Kuwait recognized the People's Republic of China. This coincided with the Sino-Soviet conflict at its height, incurring Nikita Khrushchev's displeasure. Characteristically, in order to strike balance in its relations with two communist giants, Kuwait, in February of the following year, entered economic and technical agreements with the Soviet Union and soon

established full diplomatic relations with it. Kuwait also was the first Sheikdom to recognize the Marxist regime in Aden, South Yemen.¹⁶⁾¹⁷⁾ Kuwait's *Ostpolitik* irked Saudi Arabia, whose avowed national policy being a categorical refusal to deal with the communists. Although Iran too had diplomatic relations with the Eastern block countries and exported oil to them, the Shah reportedly have referred to Kuwait with disgust as "the Finland in the Gulf."¹⁸⁾ By establishing relations with Moscow and Peking, the patrons of radical Arab states and movements including Iraq, Kuwait hoped to avert their hostility to itself. Also Moscow was expected to refrain Baghdad from threatening and harrasing Kuwait. It should be noted that this opened up the East European petroleum market, which was outside the control of the major oil companies, to Kuwaiti oil.

In this period Kuwait made a determined effort to gain its diplomatic recognition by as many countries as possible, regardless of their political system, with the exceptions of Israel and South Africa. Also it worked strenuously to seek admission into international organizations such as the United Nations and the Arab League. It almost bought its way into the international community. This, probably more than anything else, reflected the sense of insecurity that Kuwait felt about its statehood.

While playing off one power against another to secure its survival, the ruling class had to attend its domestic politics. Its internal policy is similar to its foreign policy. Namely the government bought off its citizens by erecting a super-welfare state. In addition to free medicare and education up to a graduate level study at foreign universities, the government virtually guarantees employment by over-staffing its bureaucracy. The government absorbs 70 per cent of Kuwaiti "labor" force.¹⁹⁾ Also, the government distributed its oil wealth through the unique land scheme. The process worked as follows: First the government purchased land from its citizens. Then the government poured its money to furnish a infra-structure such as road, electricity and sewage system. Reserving a portion of it for community facilities, highway networks and other public purposes, the government resold the rest to its citizens at a fraction of its cost. In this fashion the government distributed more than \$1 billion among its fortunate citizens.²⁰⁾ Then the owners constructed buildings on their land mostly for leasing. This was almost a risk free venture, for expatriate workers were flooding into Kuwait and they had to become tenants of these buildings because the law says only a Kuwaiti citizen can own real estates in this country. Through this process an owner of worthless mass of sand ended up possessing a valuable piece of land as well as the building upon it whose rent equal to that in Manhattan.

Also in order to ease the political aspiration of the citizens, the government drew up and promulgated a constitution which provided for the establishment of a national assembly of 50 representatives.²¹⁾ The electorate is confined to the first category (those who can prove that their family lived in Kuwait in 1920) male Kuwait citizens over 21. This means that only 3.5% or 57,747 out of 1.7 million

inhabitants can cast their votes.²²⁾ The assembly serves as a political safety valve. Opposition to policy of the ruling al-Sabah family came from urban progressives of the Nasserite hue. In order to neutralize them, the government granted citizenship, and voting right with it, to Bedouins (nomads) loyal to the al-Sabah family. Thus, the Kuwaiti attempt for democracy was dubbed as "Bedoucracy" with derision. The government closed the assembly in 1976 ostensibly because it took its job too seriously and attacked the government too harshly for the liking of its rulers. But the reason seems to be a pressure from Saudi Arabia to curb its democracy lest it would lead Saudi subjects to demand an assembly in their country.

III

Kuwait's search for survival has never been easy because it has rested upon the mechanism of balance of power in the region and its careful management oiled by the Kuwaiti financial clout. But it has become even more difficult after the revolution in Iran. With the fall of the Shah, the guardian of the Gulf conservatism, the mood of nervousness set in the area. And the war between Iran and Iraq heightened Kuwait's sense of insecurity.

It did not mean that the Kuwaitis loved the Shah. On the contrary his arms build-up in the 1970s was observed with alarm on the Arab side of the Gulf, for the Shah's armed forces were assessed to be too strong for internal security purpose yet at the same time too weak to engage the Soviet Red Army. Thus it was deemed useful only in regional intervention probably in Pakistan and the Arab side of the Gulf. Indeed, in the early 1970s the Iranian armed forces crossed the Straits of Hormuz to suppress the insurgency in Dhofar province in Oman. Though the Iranians fought in Oman at its Sultan's invitation, the intervention aroused Arabs' suspicion on the Shah's ultimate ambition. The Gulf Arabs feared that when the Iranian oil reserves would run out, Iran's might could be directed against their oil fields. The Iranian oil production was at that time estimated to peak in the mid-1980s. Yet, the Shah was the devil they knew well who shared pro-Western posture of the Arab conservatives on the Gulf. Also Iran was a precious counter-balance checking Iraq. His fall changed the regional scene. The Imperial Iranian Army was perceived to be disintegrating, removing the Iranian military menace. But ideologically the revolutionary regime in Tehran challenged the legitimacy of the Arab rulers, conservatives and radicals alike. The Iranian revolutionaries have exhorted Muslims in Iraq to rise against the Baathist regime for it was not Islamic. Also they called for the rebellion against the conservative Sheikhs, for they were worse than atheists; they were hypocritical and pseudo-Islamic, allying with the great Satan, the United States. A series of disturbances took place in the Arab Gulf countries. Riots in southern Iraq and in the Shiite province of Saudi Arabia, and the seizure of the Grand Mosque in Mecca just to mention a few of them. In this atmosphere of uncertainty, in September 1980 Iraq struck

and started a war against Iran.

The Iranian armed forces were demoralized by the revolution, purged by zealots, and absorbed by rebellions of various minorities. American trade embargo, as one of Washington's retaliatory measures against the hostage taking in Tehran, cut the military off from spare parts for its American weapons. Many judged it in a state of near collapse. Analysts hurriedly predicted a quick victory for Iraq within a matter of weeks. Within a matter of weeks, however, obvious it became that Iraq's *blitzkrieg* had bogged down in the sand of Khuzistan. Unexpected fierceness of Iranian resistance was only matched by clumsiness of Iraqi military performance in the battle. Soon the war reached its stalemate.

As an Arab neighbour of Iraq, Kuwait has supported Baghdad if only reluctantly. The revolution in Iran has threatened Kuwait, but it is also wary of Iraq's territorial claim. It has wanted neither the victory nor the defeat of Iraq. Yet it had to insure itself against the Iraqi victory at the initial stage of the war, for the Iraqi victory seemed all too probable not to side with it. Yet soon its misreading of the situation became apparent. The battle line stalemated and the Iranian air force bombed Kuwaiti border posts "by mistake." The Iranian message to Kuwait was obvious; "Stay away from Iraq, or many more 'mistakes' would follow!" Kuwait with no significant air defence was nothing but vulnerable. It had to accommodate Iranian pressure. At the same time, Iraq wanted to lease the strategically situated two Kuwaiti islands of Warba and Bubiyan at the mouth of the Shat al-Arab River dividing Iran and Iraq. Kuwait responded to these dual pressures from two belligerents by compromise. It has refused to allow Iraqis to use Warba and Bubiyan but has offered billions of dollars of "loans" without serious hope of the Iraqis repaying it. It also allowed Iraq-bound cargoes to be unloaded in its ports and transported through its territory. Kuwait has navigated delicately between the Scylla of the Iraqi demand and the Charybdis of an Iranian threat.

While accommodating pressures from both countries, Kuwait also sought to strengthen its defence. It tried to purchase Stinger anti-aircraft missiles from the United States only to find out that the Reagan administration was unwilling to confront the Jewish lobby's opposition to sales of sophisticated weapons to an Arab country. So Kuwait turned to the Soviet Union for provision of anti-aircraft missiles.

To a possible Iranian air attack the other Gulf Sheikdoms are as exposed as Kuwait. Among them only Saudi Arabia possesses a significant air defence as demonstrated in June 1984 when its F-15 jet fighter shot down an Iranian F-4 Phantom over the Persian Gulf. Saudi Arabia pressed for the creation and strengthening of the Gulf Co-operation Council (GCC), consisted of Arab Gulf states of conservative political inclination, namely Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Qatar, the United Arab Emirates and Oman. Saudi Arabia has sought the integration of each country's armed forces. Kuwait is more reluctant than other members in falling under the umbrella of Saudi air defence system built on American weapons

and personnel. It has too many Palestinians, too many Iranian expatriates, too many Shiites, and too many Kuwaiti citizens of Iranian extraction to side so openly with the scheme supported by Israel's ally, the U.S. Also the Kuwaiti ruling family is not willing to give up its gerously guarded independence. Thus, Kuwait's foreign policy is tiptoeing the minefield of criss-crossing pressures.

In May 1982 Iran recaptured the border city of Khorramshahr, the last significant Iraqi strong-hold inside the Iranian territory. After this Iranian success, nobody seriously has contemplated the Iraqi victory in this war. Its outcome could only be either stalemate or Iraqi defeat. Iran can not lose this war. After Khorramshahr, Kuwait together with other GCC members attempted mediation with an offer to finance Iran's post-war reconstruction. Iran wanted the change of the regime in Baghdad, no less. The mediation failed. The war continued. Kuwait had to support, this time in earnest, Saddam Hussein's regime in Baghdad with increasing "loans." Kuwait also cut back its aid to Syria to show displeasure with its support of Iran in the war.²³) Iran's victory would place its massive infantry right next to Kuwait. Between an Iraqi port of Basrah and Kuwait's capital city, there is no natural barrier. It would be an extremely uncomfortable prospect for Kuwait to contemplate. Iraq's defense line protect not only the Baathist regime in Baghdad but all the conservatives on the Gulf. Thus, Kuwait was put into an unenviable position of helping in a massive scale a country which it deems inimical to its territorial integrity. In spite of the repeated massive offensives by Iran against Iraq, the Iraqi defense line has been holding. One could almost hear Sheikhs of the Gulf breathing a sigh of relief. Commenting on this war, Henry Kissinger was once quoted to have said, "It is too bad that both sides cannot lose." But fortunately for GCC members, it is actually what has happened so far. At least neither side is winning. The war has assumed a character of long protracted one, and its end is nowhere in sight. The problem is that it is costly to keep Saddam Hussein in power. More gravely, the war could any time spill over. The expansion of the war could bring down all the Shekhdoms in ruins. The situation is as bleak as ever.

Internally Kuwait responded swiftly to the fall of the Shah by reopening its national assembly, for the ruling family felt that a political system without a safety valve was more apt to explode. Without the semblance of popular participation, the government can not hope to legitimize its rule. But soon the government, rumored to be under Saudi pressure, sought to curb the authority of the assembly only to encounter stiff popular opposition to it. The government did not force its way. The assembly was operating as lively as ever. As epitomized by this example, Kuwait survived through the crisscrossing of pressures from Iran, Iraq and Saudi Arabia managing only the minimum bent with the prevailing wind in the area precisely because their pressures crisscrossed and contradicted each other.

Six years after the fall of the Shah and five years after the initiation of the full scale war between Iran and Iraq, the situation in the Gulf is still in flux. And

because the underlining geo-political factors have not changed, Kuwait has to strive to manipulate clashing pressures from its neighbours to secure the breathing space. Kuwait's travail for survival seems to be far from over.

IV

Other GCC members have been closely observing Kuwait. Because their societies and geo-political conditions are more or less similar to those of Kuwait. Their differences are only in degree and in intensity of these characteristics not in their quality. All are small in physical size (except Saudi Arabia) and population. All depend on oil (Bahrain partially excluded). All are traditional Islamic societies, flooded by oil revenues and expatriate workers. And militarily all are insignificant perhaps save the modern, yet mostly untested, Saudi Arabia's air force.

As noted already Kuwait has distanced itself diplomatically from Baghdad once the Iraqi *blitzkrieg* bogged down in the fierce Iranian resistance in Khuzistan, the oil producing province of Southern Iran. It must, otherwise it would have run a risk of the Iranian retaliation. Among the GCC members, Kuwait has been conspicuous in its effort to stay on speaking terms with Iran. However, at the meeting held in Muscat, the capital of Oman, in November 1985, the GCC adopted more conciliatory posture toward Iran. Kuwait's position that the GCC can and has to live with revolutionary Iran was endorsed by other members. Frequent diplomatic exchanges between Iran and the GCC members ensued to the chagrin of the Baathist regime in Baghdad.

Also on September 25 and November 15, Oman and the United Arab Emirates respectively announced the establishment of diplomatic relations with the Soviet Union, about two decades after Kuwait's opening to the Eastern Block states. The other rulers of the Arabian peninsula finally came to the recognition that benefits accrued from dealing with communists outweigh the inherent risk of being influenced and penetrated by them. One notable benefit is that they can bargain harder with Washington. If they do not get the weapons they want from the U.S., they can threaten to turn to the Soviet Union. The purchase of the Soviet anti-aircraft missiles by Kuwait served this notice to the United States.

Kuwait's experiment with the parliamentary democracy has had a tremendous effect on the internal politics of other Sheikdoms. After the twin shocks in 1979 of the seizure of the Grand Mosque in Mecca and the Shiite riot, the government of Saudi Arabia has been cautiously hinting that it may open an assembly of a sort. Other Sheikdoms, too, have shown signs to follow suit.

As these examples show, by watching the way Kuwait has bent its domestic and foreign policies, one can detect a direction of the prevailing political tendency in the Gulf. Also by observing Kuwait, one can get a solid idea of where other Sheikdoms are going to, for among the oil Sheikdoms Kuwait is a pioneer whose footsteps others are likely to follow. In both senses of this word, Kuwait

serves as the weathervane in the Gulf.

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